



Senator Don Gaetz Reports to Northwest Florida

March 12, 2008

Senate Panel Changes School Grading System

High schools will no longer be graded solely on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, according to legislation passed today by the Senate Education Committee.

The state's grading system now rates schools based entirely on how students perform in FCAT assessments of writing, reading, math and science skill. The bill sponsored by committee chairman Senator Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) expands grades to include additional measurements which Gaetz says "more accurately and comprehensively depict the performance of students and schools."

Gaetz's bill, which was passed in a unanimous bipartisan vote, would continue the FCAT but have it count for half of a high school's grade. The remainder of the grade would be determined by a combination of the school's graduation rate, participation and performance of students in College Board Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate courses, dual enrollment courses, post-secondary readiness as measured by the SAT, ACT or the common placement test, and achievement of industry certification in career courses.

The chairman supported an amendment to his bill offered by Senator Ted Deutch (D-Boca Raton) that added standardized statewide end-of-course exams as another ingredient in high school grades.

“Half the students in a high school take the FCAT – primarily freshmen and sophomores,” Gaetz explained. “But, under the present system, the entire school grade is based on that partial snapshot. This legislation will include the other important indicators of performance from proficiency in career-technical courses to college readiness to a school’s success in helping all students earn a diploma. Our bill doesn’t eliminate the FCAT but builds on the FCAT to create a broader, fairer, more comprehensive accountability system.”

The grading system results in public high schools earning an A, B, C, D, or F. Poor grades can mean sanctions while schools that receive A’s also earn cash bonuses.

Appearing before the committee to advocate for the bill was Florida Education Commissioner Eric Smith, who recently served as a high ranking official with the College Board. Also speaking in support was Patricia Levesque, Executive Director of former Governor Jeb Bush’s Foundation for Florida’s Future. Officials of the Florida PTA also endorsed the bill.

For more information on Senate Bill 1908, go to www.flsenate.gov